DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 119 TM 021 962

AUTHOR Kominski, Robert; Adams, Andrea
TITLE We the Americans: Our Education.
INSTITUTION Bureau of the Census (DOC), Suitland, Md.
PUB DATE Sep 93
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Statistical Data (110) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Persistence; Bachelors Degrees; *Census Figures; Doctoral Degrees; *Educational Attainment; Educational History; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *Enrollment; Ethnic Groups; *Higher Education; High School Graduates; Masters Degrees; Racial Differences; Sex Differences; Tables (Data); Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS Census 1990

ABSTRACT

Information about education in the United States from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing is presented. In 1990, there were nearly 65 million Americans enrolled in school. Nearly half were enrolled in elementary school, with 17 percent in high school and more than 25 percent enrolled in colleges across the nation. More citizens are going to school, and more are staying in school longer. Educational attainment has increased steadily since 1940. For the first time in the country's history, more than three-fourths of those over 25 had completed high school. Differences in the educational attainment of men and women is relatively small, but the same cannot be said for differences between ethnic and racial groups. However, all groups have improved in high school completion in the past decade. Nearly one-fifth of all adults have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, and 7 percent of adults reported that they held an advanced degree. Four tables and 12 figures summarize the information about educational enrollment and attainment in the United States. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 372 119

WE-11

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

We the Americans: Our Education

Issued September 1993

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TM021962

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by **Robert Kominski,** assisted by **Andrea Adams,** Education and Social Stratification Branch.

Susan J. Lapham, Population Division, provided general direction. **Janice Valdisera** and **Michael Levin,** Population Division, and **Paula Coupe** and **Dwight Johnson,** Public Information Office, reviewed the report. **Marie Pees,** Population Division, provided computer programming support. **Debra Niner** and **Mary Kennedy,** Population Division, provided review assistance.

Alfredo Navarro, Decennial Statistical Studies Division, provided statistical review.

The staff of Administrative and Publications Services Division, **Walter C. Odom,** Chief, performed publication planning, design, composition, editorial review, and printing planning and procurement. **Cynthia G. Brooks** provided publication coordination and editing. **Kim Blackwell** provided design and graphics services. **Diane Oliff–Michael** coordinated printing services.

We, the Americans: Our Education

Introduction

We Americans are known for many achievements — our standard of living, our discoveries and inventions, and our ability to organize and overcome problems. We tend to think of these achievements in terms of material things — things like the space shuttle, microwave ovens, and super computers. But as important as these are, they are only byproducts of America's greatest achievement — the ever increasing level of education of its population.

The first question about education — "Can you read and write?" — was asked in the 1840 census. At that time, more than 1 in every 5 persons were illiterate. The general illiteracy rate decreased steadily over the years. Questions on illiteracy were dropped in the 1940 census.

Since the Census Bureau first began measuring educational attainment as completed schooling in the 1940 census, the educational level of the population has risen steadily. In the 50 years since then, the United States has made great strides in education. Not only are more of us going to school, but we are also starting earlier and staying longer. In 1990, about 75 percent of the adult population had received at least a high school diploma compared with about 25 percent in 1940.

In the 1990 census, we measured the completion of specific college degrees (for example, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees) for the first time. These data show that over 20 million Americans held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of schooling, and another 11 million have a professional or graduate degree.

The advantages of a good education are many, but they boil down to one main point: having a good education gives a person the opportunity to make the most of his or her talents. The quality of life in America's future is inseparably bound to the quality — and quantity — of education obtained by each of its members.

In 1990, there were nearly 65 million of us enrolled in school.

Because the school-age population of the United States has grown tremendously since 1940, it's not surprising to find that the number of us going to school is greater now than in 1940.

More importantly, the proportion of Americans between the ages of 5 and 24 going to school has grown from 58 percent in 1940 to 70 percent in 1990.

Nearly half of the total 65 million students were enrolled in elementary school; 17 percent were in high school, and over one-fourth were enrolled in colleges across the Nation.

Figure 1a.
School-Age Population and Enrollment: 1940 to 1990

(Millions. Persons 5 to 24 years old)

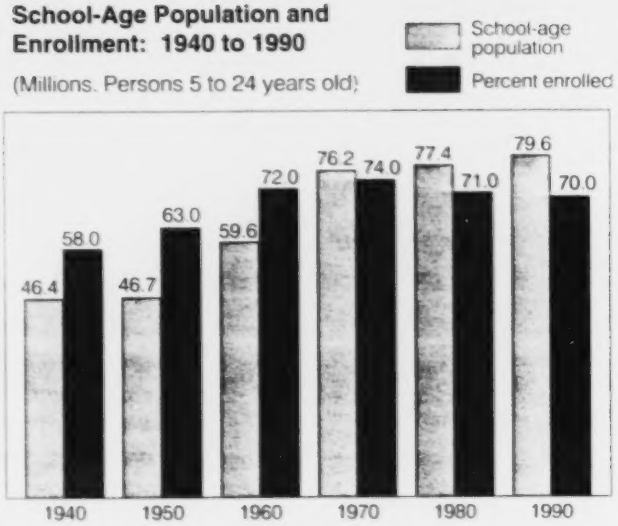
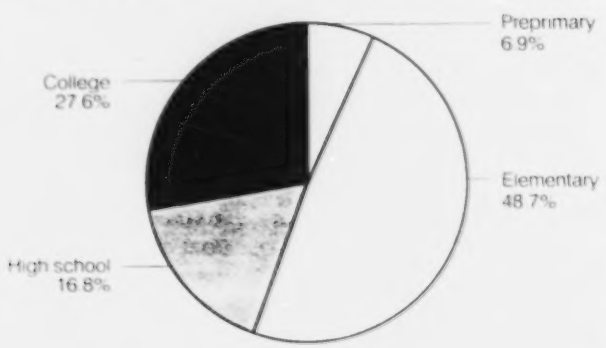


Figure 1b.
Percent Distribution of Students: 1990

(Persons 3 years old and over enrolled in school)



Not only are more of us going to school, but we are starting earlier and staying longer.

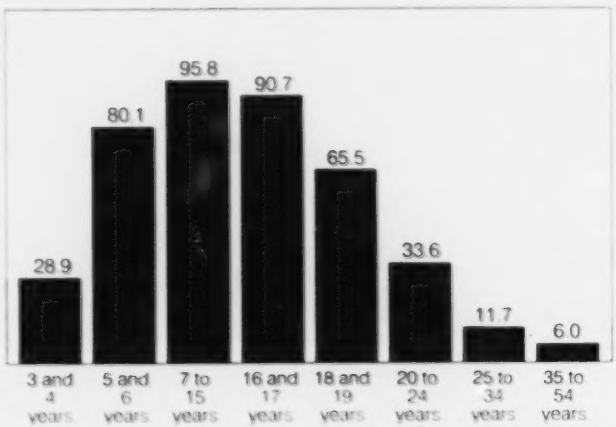
Since the turn of the century, it has been compulsory for almost all children between 7 and 15 years old to go to school. About 96 percent of persons 7 to 15 years old were enrolled in school in 1990.

Nearly 30 percent of persons 3 and 4 years old were enrolled in preschool and about 80 percent of persons 5 and 6 years old were enrolled in school.

About 34 percent of persons 20 to 24 years old and 12 percent of persons 25 to 34 years old were enrolled in college.

Figure 2.
School Enrollment by Age: 1990

(Percent of persons 3 to 54 years old enrolled in school)



Our educational attainment increased steadily since 1940.

Educational attainment levels for all persons 25 years old and over have increased over the last 50 years. During the period from 1940 to 1990, the proportion of the population completing high school rose substantially.

Three-quarters of the adult population had completed at least a high school diploma in 1990 compared with about 25 percent in 1940, 41 percent in 1960, and 67 percent in 1980.

One-fifth of the adult population had completed a bachelor's degree or more in 1990 compared with about 5 percent in 1940, 8 percent in 1960, and 16 percent in 1980.

In 1990, over 1 million persons held a doctorate degree.

Figure 3a.

Educational Attainment of the Adult Population: 1940 to 1990

(Percent 25 years old and over)

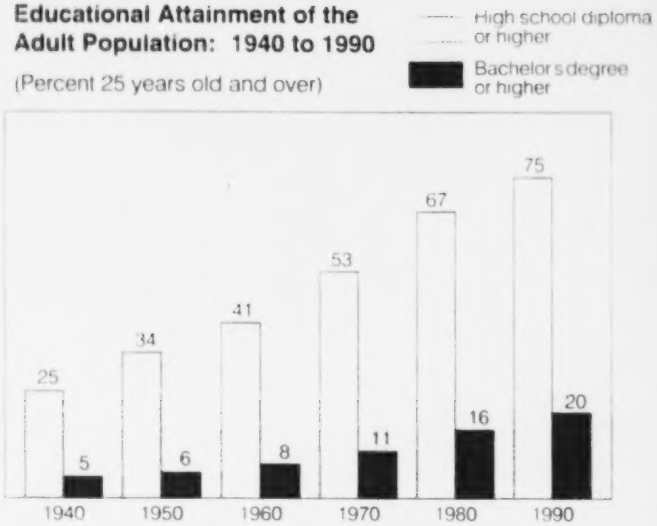


Figure 3b.

Educational Distribution of the Adult Population: 1990

(Percent 25 years old and over)

Advanced degree 7.2%
Bachelor's degree 13.1%
Associate degree 6.2%
Some college, no degree 18.7%
Less than 9 years 10.4%
9 to 12 years, no diploma 14.4%
High school diploma only 30.0%

For the first time in our Nation's history more than three-fourths of us graduated from high school.

Part of the rising level of educational attainment is the natural replacement of older generations by younger people who have had better educational opportunities.

In 1990, about 34 percent of persons 75 years old and over did not complete the 9th grade compared with only 4 percent of persons 25 to 34 years old.

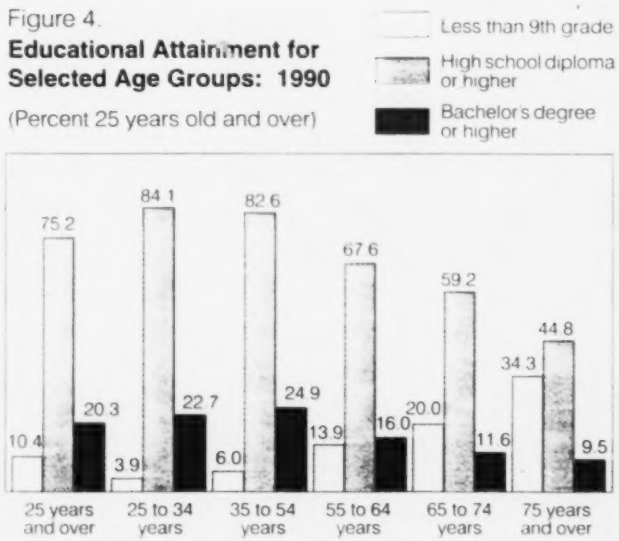
About 45 percent of persons 75 years old and over completed a high school diploma or more compared with 84 percent of persons 25 to 34 years old.

The proportion of persons 75 years old and over with a bachelor's degree or more was about 10 percent in 1990 compared with about 23 percent of persons 25 to 34 years old.

Figure 4.

Educational Attainment for Selected Age Groups: 1990

(Percent 25 years old and over)



Differences in the educational attainment of men and women are relatively small.

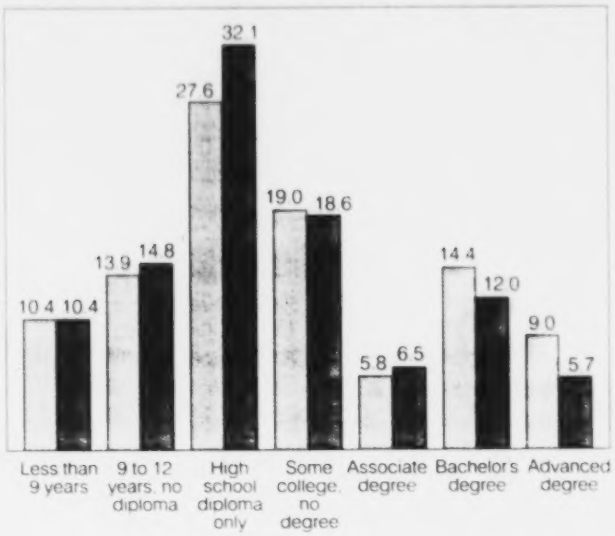
A larger proportion of men (27 percent) than women (24 percent) hold a college degree of some kind. Women are more likely than men to have completed only a high school diploma, 32 percent and 28 percent, respectively.

Among women 25 to 34 years old, 32 percent have a college degree compared with 30 percent of men in this age group.

Young women 25 to 39 years old also were slightly more likely than young men in this age group to be enrolled in school, 11 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

Figure 5.
Educational Attainment of Adults by Sex: 1990

(Percent of persons 25 years old and over)



Our educational attainment differs by racial and ethnic groups, but all groups have improved in the past decade.

In 1990, high school completion levels were highest for Whites, with Asian and Pacific Islanders not far behind.

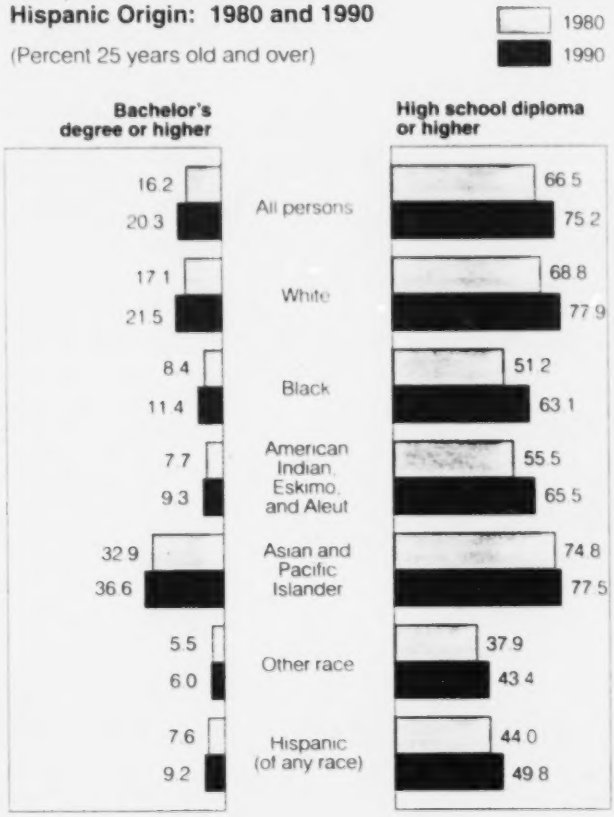
Substantial improvements in high school completion occurred during the decade for Blacks and American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts.

There was also an increase in the proportion of college graduates for each racial group and Hispanics from 1980 to 1990.

In 1990, the highest level of college completion was for Asian and Pacific Islanders at 37 percent.

Figure 6.
Completion Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1980 and 1990

(Percent 25 years old and over)



Some Asian and Pacific Islander groups have among the highest high school and college completion rates.

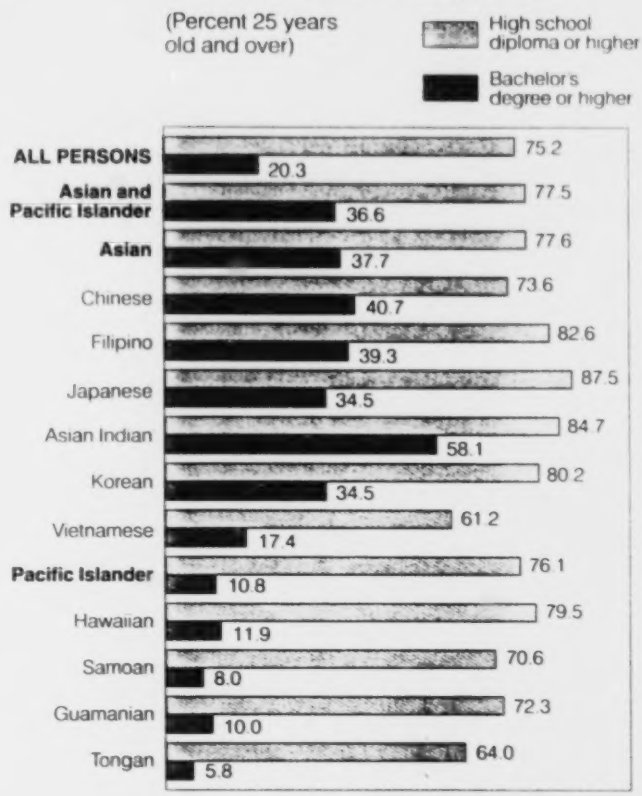
In 1990, among Asian and Pacific Islander groups, Japanese persons had the highest proportion of high school graduates, at 88 percent. Other Asian and Pacific Islander groups with proportions greater than 80 percent included Asian Indians, Filipinos, and Koreans.

In general, Asian and Pacific Islanders had a higher proportion of college graduates than all persons 25 years old and over, 37 percent versus 20 percent.

Asians (38 percent) had a higher proportion of college graduates than Pacific Islanders (11 percent).

Among Asian and Pacific Islanders, Asian Indians had the highest level of college graduates at 58 percent.

Figure 7.
High School and Bachelor's Degree Completion Rates for Selected Asian and Pacific Islander Groups: 1990



There is great variability in the educational attainment of Hispanic persons.

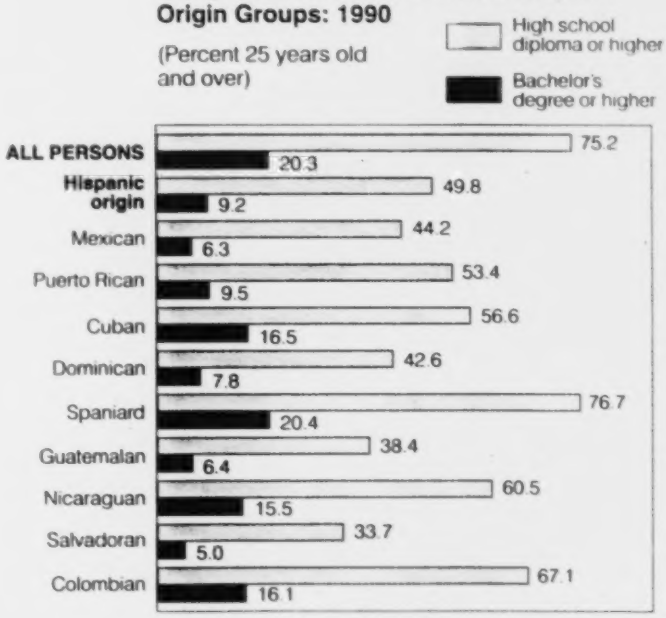
Like the rest of the Nation, persons of Hispanic origin (who may be of any race) have made great strides in their educational attainment since 1970. In 1970, about 36 percent of Hispanic adults had finished high school, compared with about half in 1990.

High school completion varied considerably among Hispanic groups, from a high of 77 percent for Spaniards (persons who identified themselves as "Spaniard" in the Hispanic origin question) to a low of 34 percent for Salvadorans.

About 9 percent of all Hispanics held a bachelor's degree or higher in 1990.

As with high school completion, Hispanic groups varied in terms of college completion, ranging from 20 percent for Spaniards to 5 percent for Salvadorans.

Figure 8.
High School and Bachelor's Degree Completion Rates for Selected Hispanic Origin Groups: 1990



Educational attainment levels vary markedly across the United States. As the following series of maps show, there is great diversity in America in our schooling.

About 11 percent of all persons 16 to 19 years old have dropped out of school.

The proportion of "dropouts," persons 16 to 19 years old who are not enrolled in school and not high school graduates, tells us a lot about how well areas are educating their youth.

With the exception of the District of Columbia and Hawaii, all States had a lower proportion of dropouts in 1990 than in 1980.

Many of the States with the lowest dropout rates were in the Midwest, for example, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa.

Despite improvements across the Nation, the States with the highest proportions of dropouts were in the South and West in 1990. The highest dropout rate was in Nevada, at 15 percent.

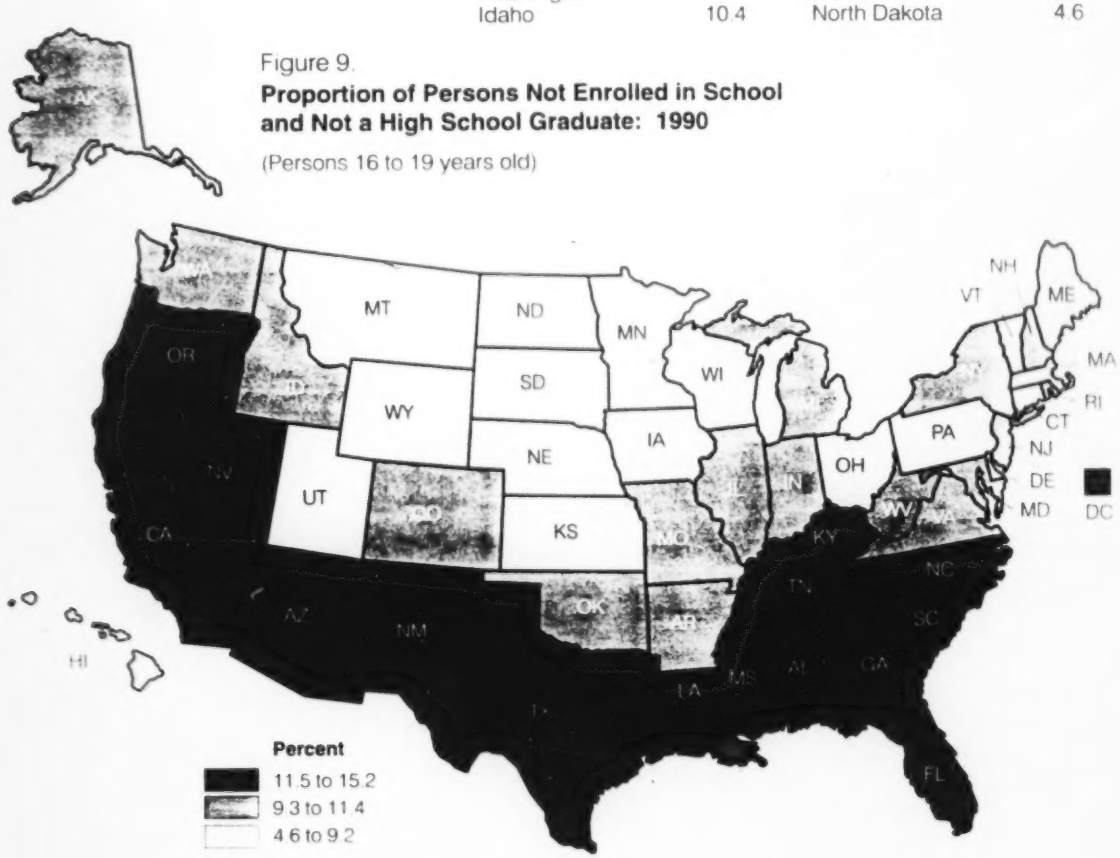
Table 1.
Rank Order by State of Persons Not Enrolled in School and Not a High School Graduate: 1990

(Percent of persons 16 to 19 years old)

United States	**11.2**		
Nevada	15.2	Delaware	10.4
Arizona	14.4	Oklahoma	10.4
Florida	14.3	Michigan	10.0
California	14.2	Virginia	10.0
Georgia	14.1	New York	9.9
DC	13.9	Colorado	9.8
Tennessee	13.4	New Jersey	9.6
Kentucky	13.3	New Hampshire	9.4
Texas	12.9	Pennsylvania	9.1
Alabama	12.6	Connecticut	9.0
Louisiana	12.5	Ohio	8.9
North Carolina	12.5	Kansas	8.7
Mississippi	11.8	Utah	8.7
Oregon	11.8	Massachusetts	8.5
South Carolina	11.7	Maine	8.3
New Mexico	11.7	Montana	8.1
Missouri	11.4	Vermont	8.0
Arkansas	11.4	South Dakota	7.7
Indiana	11.4	Hawaii	7.5
Rhode Island	11.1	Wisconsin	7.1
West Virginia	10.9	Nebraska	7.0
Alaska	10.9	Wyoming	6.9
Maryland	10.9	Iowa	6.6
Illinois	10.6	Minnesota	6.4
Washington	10.6	North Dakota	4.6
Idaho	10.4		

Figure 9.
Proportion of Persons Not Enrolled in School and Not a High School Graduate: 1990

(Persons 16 to 19 years old)



Nationally, three-quarters of all adults have completed a high school diploma or more.

The fundamental measure of educational status is the proportion of persons who have completed high school. This single measure is the one most often used to portray the educational achievement of the population.

In both 1980 and 1990, Alaska ranked first as the State with the highest proportion of high school graduates.

Every State in the country showed an increase from 1980 in the proportion of persons with a high school diploma.

Many of the States in the South are among those with the lowest high school completion levels, while the States in the Midwest and Northwest tend to be higher than the national average (75 percent).

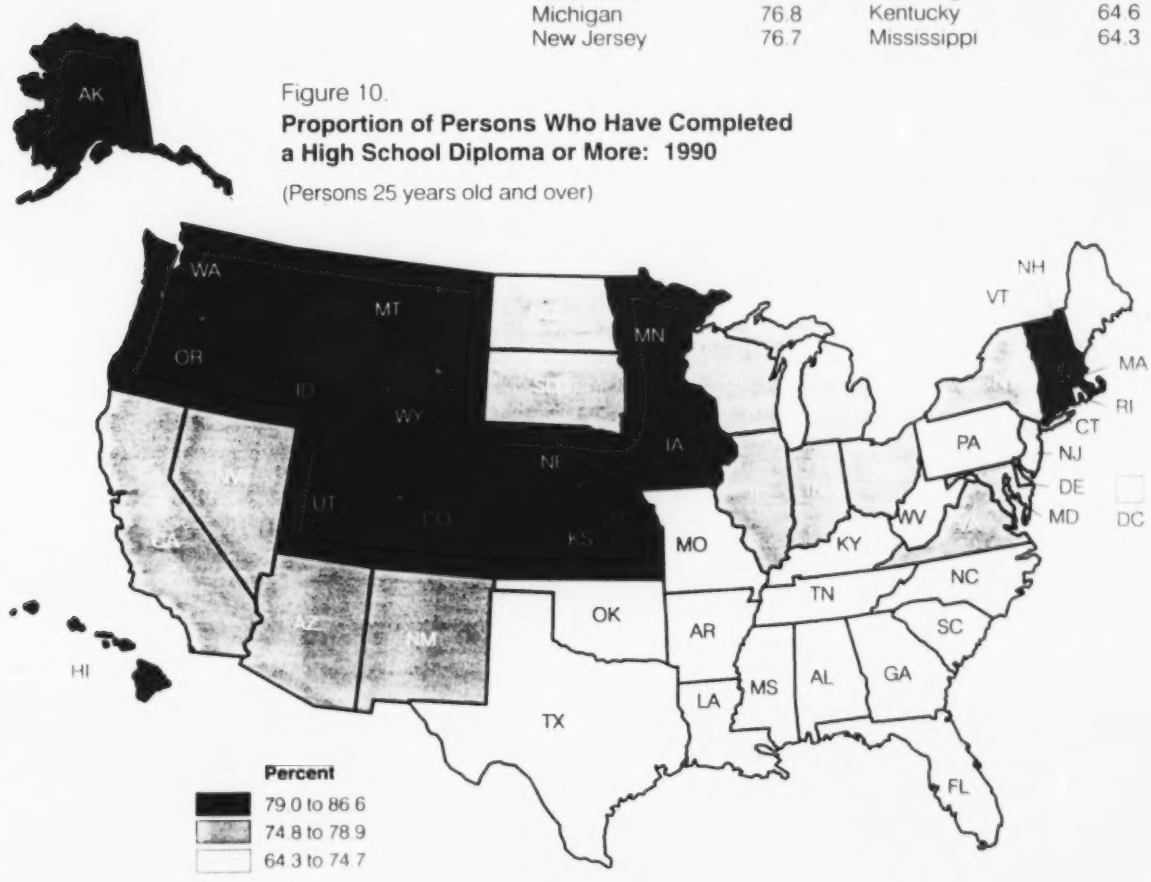
Table 2.
Rank Order by State of Persons Who Have Completed a High School Diploma or More: 1990

(Percent of persons 25 years old and over)

United States	**75.2**		
Alaska	86.6	North Dakota	76.7
Utah	85.1	Illinois	76.2
Colorado	84.4	California	76.2
Washington	83.8	Ohio	75.7
Wyoming	83.0	Indiana	75.6
Minnesota	82.4	Virginia	75.2
New Hampshire	82.2	New Mexico	75.1
Nebraska	81.8	New York	74.8
Oregon	81.5	Pennsylvania	74.7
Kansas	81.3	Oklahoma	74.6
Montana	81.0	Florida	74.4
Vermont	80.8	Missouri	73.9
Iowa	80.1	DC	73.1
Hawaii	80.1	Texas	72.1
Massachusetts	80.0	Rhode Island	72.0
Idaho	79.7	Georgia	70.9
Connecticut	79.2	North Carolina	70.0
Nevada	78.8	Louisiana	68.3
Maine	78.8	South Carolina	68.3
Arizona	78.7	Tennessee	67.1
Wisconsin	78.6	Alabama	66.9
Maryland	78.4	Arkansas	66.3
Delaware	77.5	West Virginia	66.0
South Dakota	77.1	Kentucky	64.6
Michigan	76.8	Mississippi	64.3
New Jersey	76.7		

Figure 10.
Proportion of Persons Who Have Completed a High School Diploma or More: 1990

(Persons 25 years old and over)



About one-fifth of all adults have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

The proportion of college graduates increased from 1980 for the Nation as a whole, as well as for every State.

Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island were among States with the largest increase in the proportion of persons with postsecondary degrees compared to 1980.

The District of Columbia, relatively low in its proportion of high school graduates, had the highest college completion rates in both 1980 (28 percent) and 1990 (33 percent).

The areas with the largest proportion of college graduates are the District of Columbia, the Northeast, and a group of selected "high-tech" States in the West.

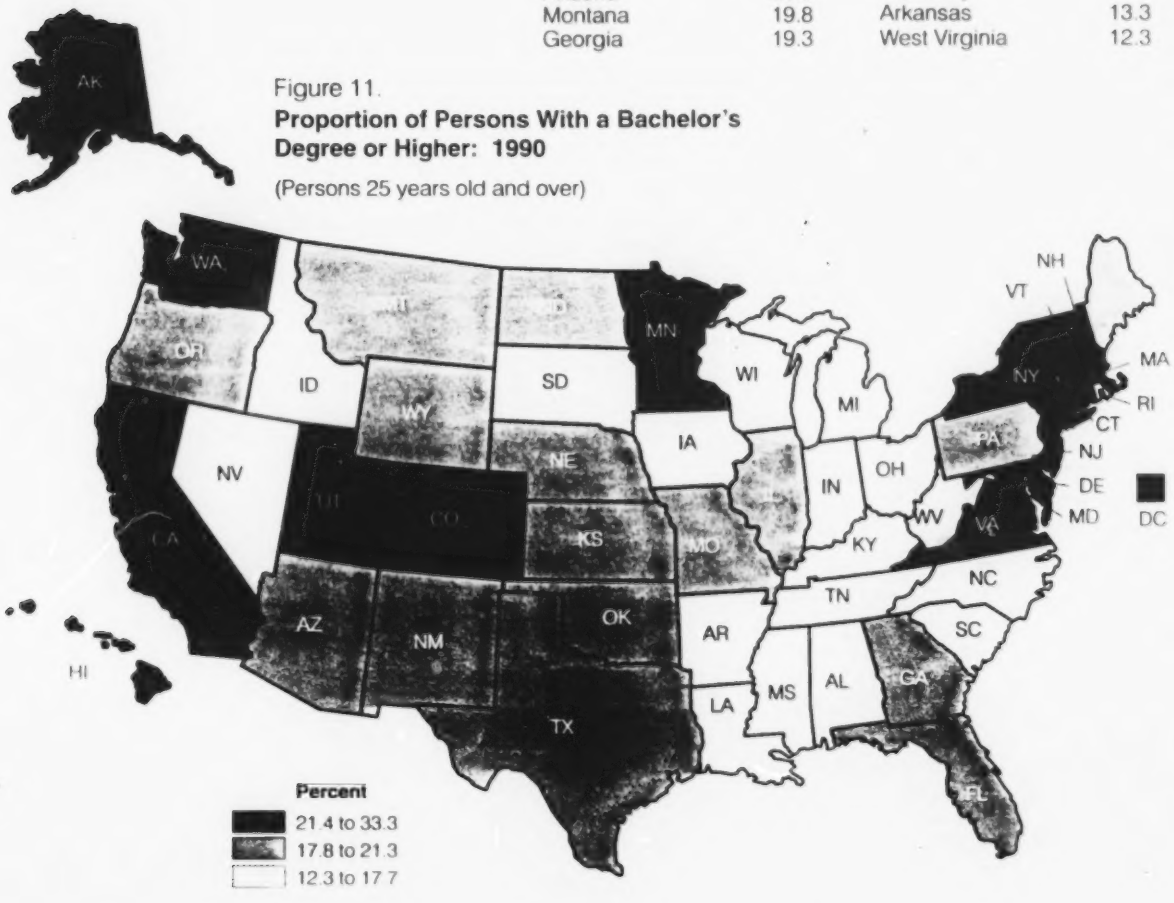
Table 3.
Rank Order by State of Persons With a Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 1990

(Percent of persons 25 years old and over)

United States	**13.1**		
DC	33.3	Nebraska	18.9
Massachusetts	27.2	Maine	18.8
Connecticut	27.2	Wyoming	18.8
Colorado	27.0	Florida	18.3
Maryland	26.5	North Dakota	18.1
New Jersey	24.9	Pennsylvania	17.9
Virginia	24.5	Oklahoma	17.8
New Hampshire	24.4	Missouri	17.8
Vermont	24.3	Idaho	17.7
California	23.4	Wisconsin	17.7
New York	23.1	Michigan	17.4
Alaska	23.0	North Carolina	17.4
Washington	22.9	South Dakota	17.2
Hawaii	22.9	Ohio	17.0
Utah	22.3	Iowa	16.9
Minnesota	21.8	South Carolina	16.6
Delaware	21.4	Louisiana	16.1
Rhode Island	21.3	Tennessee	16.0
Kansas	21.1	Alabama	15.7
Illinois	21.0	Indiana	15.6
Oregon	20.6	Nevada	15.3
New Mexico	20.4	Mississippi	14.7
Texas	20.3	Kentucky	13.6
Arizona	20.3	Arkansas	13.3
Montana	19.8	West Virginia	12.3
Georgia	19.3		

Figure 11.
Proportion of Persons With a Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 1990

(Persons 25 years old and over)



In 1990, 7 percent of adults reported that they held an advanced degree—master's, doctorate, or professional.

In 1990, the District of Columbia had the highest level of advanced degree holders at 17 percent.

Most States with high proportions of persons with advanced degrees also have a major metropolitan area or have a large concentration of high-technology industries, for example, Massachusetts, New York, and California.

States with relatively low proportions of advanced degree holders tend to be concentrated in the rural South and Northwest.

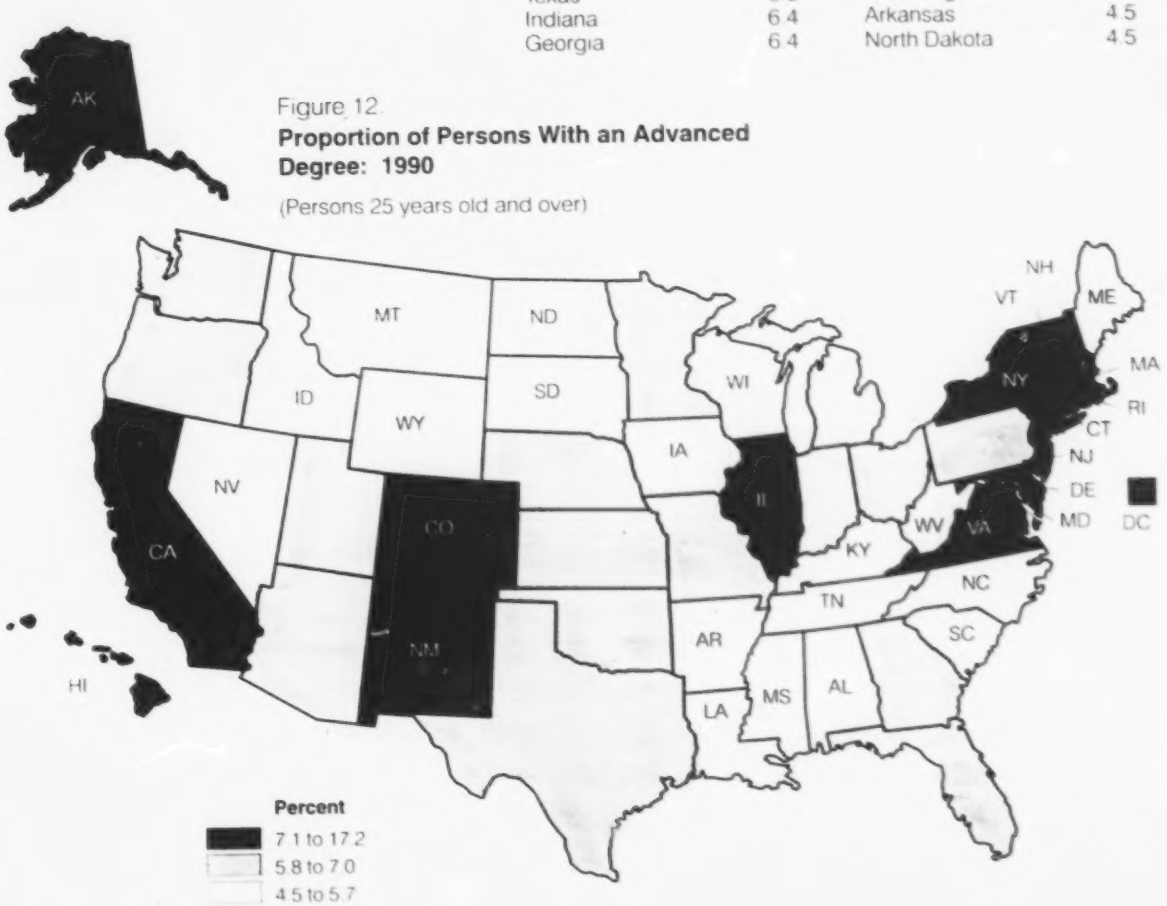
Table 4
Rank Order by State of Persons With an Advanced Degree: 1990

(Percent of persons 25 years old and over)

United States	**7.2**		
DC	17.2	Michigan	6.4
Connecticut	11.0	Florida	6.3
Maryland	10.9	Minnesota	6.3
Massachusetts	10.6	Missouri	6.1
New York	9.9	Maine	6.1
Virginia	9.1	Oklahoma	6.0
Colorado	9.0	Nebraska	5.9
Vermont	8.9	Ohio	5.9
New Jersey	8.8	Montana	5.7
New Mexico	8.3	Wyoming	5.7
California	8.1	Wisconsin	5.6
Alaska	8.0	Louisiana	5.6
New Hampshire	7.9	Alabama	5.5
Rhode Island	7.8	Kentucky	5.5
Delaware	7.7	Tennessee	5.4
Illinois	7.5	North Carolina	5.4
Hawaii	7.1	South Carolina	5.4
Washington	7.0	Idaho	5.3
Arizona	7.0	Nevada	5.2
Kansas	7.0	Iowa	5.2
Oregon	7.0	Mississippi	5.1
Utah	6.8	South Dakota	4.9
Pennsylvania	6.6	West Virginia	4.8
Texas	6.5	Arkansas	4.5
Indiana	6.4	North Dakota	4.5
Georgia	6.4		

Figure 12.
Proportion of Persons With an Advanced Degree: 1990

(Persons 25 years old and over)



Information in this report is based on the 1990 Census of Population and Housing. Estimated population and housing unit totals based on tabulations from only the sample tabulations may differ from the official 100-percent counts. Such differences result, in part, from collecting data from a sample of households rather than all households. Differences also can occur because of the interview situation and the processing rules differing between the 100-percent and sample tabulations. These types of differences are referred to as nonsampling errors.

Other reports in this series:

We, the American Blacks
We, the American Hispanics
We, the American Asians
We, the American Pacific Islanders
We, the First Americans
We, the Americans: Our Homes
We, the American Foreign Born
We, the American Women
We, the American Elderly
We, the American Children
We, the Americans

For additional information, please contact:

Education and Social Stratification Branch
Population Division
Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC 20233

☆U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 1991: 350-611